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Epiphany 2

Ephesians 3:14-21

IMMEASURABLY MORE

Ephesians 3 says: *God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us.* Living proof was the man who wrote those words. The apostle Paul had been steeped in a highly-educated, Judaic, self-righteous, super-achiever, Jesus-hating life and career. Even as he was on his way to Damascus with a warrant to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial, Jesus did immeasurably more than all we could have asked or imagined. Jesus intervened with Paul on that road and converted him to faith. Paul, the Christian-hater, became a Christian. Not only did Paul become a most fervent believer, not only did this proud and murderous man become a humble and willing sufferer for Jesus Christ, God used Paul to write more books of the Bible than any other individual. God also used Paul to spread the gospel and establish churches throughout

the world to a degree perhaps greater than any other apostle.

It was now Paul's delight to write the Gentile believers in Ephesus to teach and assure them that they too were included in God's household of faith. Being new to the faith and not having any background in the richness of the Old Testament prophecies and promises about the Messiah, not to mention the rituals and ceremonies that sustained the anticipation of the Messiah, these Gentile believers may have felt like they were outsiders, second-rate citizens in God's Kingdom. Perhaps God allowed them to be saved, but not *all* the blessings of salvation were available to them as they would be for the longtime Jewish believers.

In this letter Paul assured them that through faith in Jesus not only were they included in God's household, full citizens of God's Kingdom, but they had 100 percent share in all the blessings of salvation. For them as for any believer, God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

If God offers that truth to us –that He is able to do immeasurably more –do you sense, do you hear that He is also inviting you to ask Him?

With this in mind, Paul spells out his personal prayer for them. First, he asks that God would strengthen their faith. To have faith in Jesus requires a power from God equal to raising the dead. But Paul knows God is not stingy about working and strengthening faith. He is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. So Paul writes: *I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

Out of His glorious riches... there is a wealth beyond measuring, a divine warehouse of grace so large you cannot walk from one end of it to the other. Your heavenly Father is not reluctant to shower his children with gifts.

You know your weaknesses, your own lack of trust, the moments you wish you could believe more. You know your own struggle with hopelessness, when you've all but given up. Or perhaps you have a deep ache and at times you just get tired of coping with it. If only you could be one of those confident believers who seem

undaunted by any hardship! Are you wishing you could understand the Word of God better? Are you wishing you had more wisdom for sorting things out especially in today's confusing cultural changes? Maybe you wish God would sanctify you more –that He might help you, give you some sort of release especially from a certain sin that has you enslaved –you keep going back to it knowing that it's harmful and not God-pleasing. Maybe it's just that you wish for God's comfort, you wish you could believe He's near you because your heart and mind are in turmoil.

God is able to grant you what you ask. For He is able to do immeasurably more than all you can ask or imagine. He is able to send the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith. Already at your baptism, Titus chapter 3 says that God poured out the Holy Spirit on you *abundantly*. Through His Word He promises He will continue to pour out His Spirit on you. If that's not enough Jesus promises to live in you by faith. As you receive the Lord's Supper and there you receive the body and blood of your Lord Jesus, be assured that this Champion against sin does live in you. The Holy Spirit and Christ Himself working in us –these are immeasurable gifts, infinitely greater than any other help, anything else we could have asked for or

imagined. They are real, true, and powerful in spite of any weakness, fear or even sin we are feeling. Your feelings are not reality. God's truth is.

Just as difficult as faith is love. Not a special feeling you have for someone. Rather, true love begins with obeying the commandments of God. True love is also when I sacrifice myself for a person and do what's in his best interest in spite of how I feel about him. This is why Jesus could tell us to love even our enemies. But just as faith does not come to us naturally, that kind of love does not come by us naturally either. We are born loving ourselves first. We measure people on the basis of how they treat us. "If they are nice to me, I like them. If they are not nice to me, I don't like them!" See how self-centered that is? On top of that, our culture has groomed us to always be victims, to be offended at the drop of a hat, to demand what suits me, and to disconnect our sense of personhood from any duty or obligation to others except what we choose for our own gratification. Perhaps you personally struggle to love (or shall we say, "be kind") to someone whom you feel doesn't deserve it. Maybe it's even your spouse.

But if faith puts us in the household of God, love marks us as belonging to that household. So the Apostle Paul

writes, *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge –that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.* I cannot know love unless I first know Christ's love for me. The infinite and all-powerful one sacrificed His life on the cross to save me. By His sufferings and death on the cross He atoned to God the Father for my inability to love, my lovelessness. By His forgiveness He brought me into the household of God. He did this not because I am so lovable, but because He is so loving. It's more than I could have imagined!

By doing all these things He has rescued me from death, the devil, hell, judgement, disease, and all bad things. Immeasurably more than I could have asked!

The more I get to know Christ, the more I discover how vast his love is. Picture yourself like a small fish in a vast ocean. As you trust in Jesus you are in the vast ocean of His love. You can swim up or down or east or west and never find the edges of the ocean.

As I am surrounded by Christ's love, upheld by it, covered, wrapped around, sheltered and sustained by His love, I might get brave enough to take a single small step of committing an act of love to another person. For I am safe and have all that I need because I have Christ. I can live to serve others. I will find that as I begin to act in love, as I grow in conducting acts of love, the love of Christ will show itself to me in even more multifaceted, unexpected, endless ways.

God is able to do these immeasurable things. He is able to cause a person spiritually dead without faith to believe, and He can even strengthen a person's faith in spite of all that person's instincts. He is also able to cause the unloving to excel in demonstrating love.

That's just the beginning. Just the starting point. *He is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.* After He has worked faith and love in us, imagine, just imagine what things we could ask from Him, and He will respond with something immeasurably greater than whatever we thought. So where will you start? Where will you start?

Will you pray for all Muslims? That God would grant them faith and love? Will you pray for the LGBT community? For those engaged in the abortion industry? For all university students? For those caught in the opioid crisis? Will you pray that God use you like the Apostle Paul to reach people here in Sun Prairie? Will you pray for someone in your own household? Will you pray for yourself in your worst moments?

Immeasurably more than what you can ask or imagine. That's what He can do.